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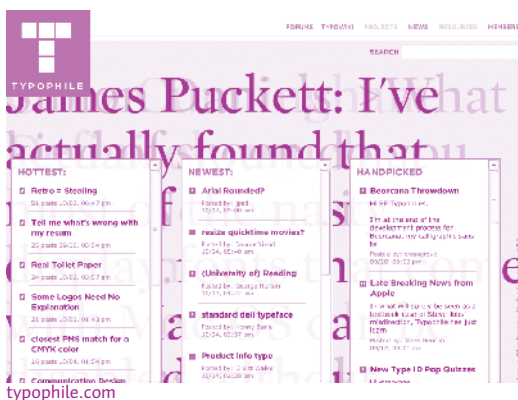
# Parallel Strokes

IAN LYNAM

It's a ninety-degree day in June in 2004 and I'm in the Mid-City area of Los Angeles scrubbing a sizable roman numeral XIV tag off of the front of my apartment building with steel wool. It's no fun. The paint is coming off, but so is the layer underneath. I'm quickly revealing raw stucco as I grind away the base coat of latex. I want it gone, and repeated calls to the landlord have shown that he's too lazy to come over and clean it off. My parents are flying in for a visit the next day and I'd rather they didn't see that my subplot is in gang territory, even if gang activity is almost nonexistent around my apartment. My arm is getting tired and I remember the one anti-graffiti lecture I received from my dad at age fourteen for tagging the local convenience store. Not very smart for a weirdo kid in a town whose population was just over 1000 people. Interwoven into the lecture was my dad's description of the graffiti of a Hayward, California cholo gang called *Los Gusanos*, their presence in that community in the 1960s, and the shadow it cast on the entire community. It was a number of years later that I actually came into visual contact with cholo gang graffiti, and when I did, it immediately reminded me of my father's description. That lecture stuck with me, even though my folks know my interest in lettering of all forms, and despite my respect for barrio graffiti letter forms, I didn't want my folks to see these marks on my building.

That my father is somewhat graffiti literate, still surprises me. As for my 14 year old nephew, I'm not so surprised, as he's a full-on media junkie soaking up cable TV, internet, movies, and video games all day long in suburban Colorado. He can easily discuss tagging and piecing with me, and has a pretty sophisticated understanding of graffiti for a non-practitioner due to exposure to the 2006 graffiti-themed video game *Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure*. The game features a number of in-game characters based on seminal graffiti artists like Futura, Cope 2, Seen, and Smith. The game has pushed forward laypeople's knowledge of popular graffiti artists, contemporary terminology, and understanding of graffiti practices.

As both are personal computer-users, they are both fairly typographically literate. Each can tell you the difference between Times New Roman and Helvetica, as can most computer users. With the continued development of the internet and exposure to immense amounts of research information about subcultural histories and information, more and more people are becoming informed about formerly culturally peripheral practices like typography and graffiti with ease. While graffiti has appeal due to its illegality and excitement, typography is simply omnipresent in today's PC-steeped information society. Anyone seeking to further their typographic knowledge can easily look up typography-centric websites like *typographi.com* and *typophile.com* and further their typographic understanding and know-how.



Atari's *Getting Up* video game



Cope freight burner.

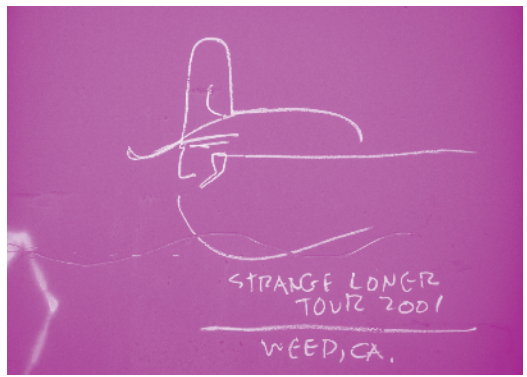


Smith in Belfast.

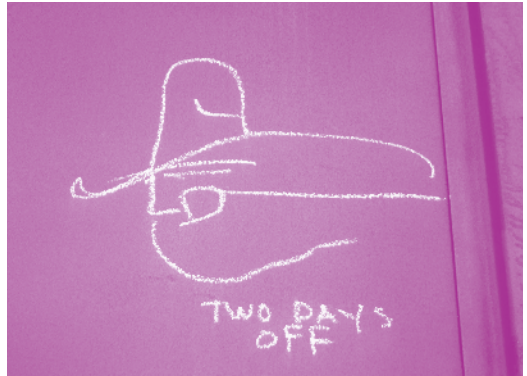
If we look at graffiti and typography and study their visual commonalities as lettering, much is revealed. Writing is graphic design. This is the first line of Gerrit Noordzij's essay, *The Nature of Writing*, the introduction to his argument that writing is graphic in nature and reliant upon aspects of visual perception such as form, rhythm, color, shade, and composition. Examinations of vernacular lettering have explored the visual and semantic importance of our most common surroundings. In doing so, graffiti was often noted, but had rarely been critically assessed in design writing within the last thirty years. Perhaps deemed too transgressive, too immature, or too inaccessible to design culture at large, graffiti had consistently been treated as kids' stuff. As graffiti matured and diversified, more and more of its aesthetics seeped into graphic design, and it gained acceptance in the popular culture at large. Now comfortably in its fourth decade as a contemporary mode of communication graffiti is regularly celebrated and canonized in the many books and graphic design magazines that come out almost daily. Beyond aesthetic fashion and sub-cultural trends, graffiti and design, specifically typography, share a common ancestry in the written word.

Graffiti from as far back as 80 B.C. contains some of the best records of early Roman writing systems, as papyri and scrolls tend to have a very short shelf-life. In 19th Century England graffiti existed as a socially acceptable method of communication. Graffiti did not have the transgressive symbolism it has today, as cultural attitudes toward property differed from contemporary ones. Marking stones were commonly sold on the street, and according to Juliet Fleming's *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, "the bulk of early modern writing was on the walls".

Conceptions changed over the years, by the time the early 20th Century hobos, Mexican American shoeshine boys and Filipino American zoot-suiters were marking surfaces, graffiti had been deemed a criminal and anti-social activity. Crayons, shoe dye daubers and lighters were regularly used to mark surfaces. It wasn't until the late 1960s and early 1970s that graffiti developed into a self-aware subculture with roots in the urban centers of New York and Philadelphia. The true origin of today's name-centric graffiti or tag, often associated with hip-hop culture, is unclear and still argued by parties on all sides. The first graffiti artists, known as writers, to be credited with tagging en masse were Philadelphia's Cornbread and Cool Earl. Both date back to the mid 1960s. Cornbread's claim to fame was having painted the Jackson Five's private jet in 1965, for which he received ample media coverage. Demetrius, a teenage immigrant from Greece, lived on 183rd Street in New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood. As a foot messenger he traveled throughout the city and left his nickname and street number, Taki 183, in permanent marker on buildings, trucks, and in subway stations. He gained legendary status as the first writer to coat all five boroughs and go all-city. A 1971 article in the *New York Times* about Taki 183 detailed the



hobo streak by Colossus of Roads



hobo streak by Colossus of Roads



Zephyr in the trainyard



Taki 183 image



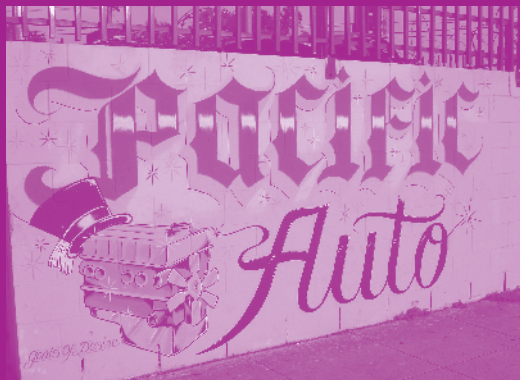
EyeOne SH (top), Skypager LORDS (bottom)



Bala blockbuster inspired by block writing, Los Angeles



Los Angeles gang graffiti representing Big Hazard



signage use of barrio calligraphy blackletter



Rick using altered blackletter, Los Angeles



Skept, modified blackletter, Los Angeles



Rifle, typical barrio gang letterforms, Los Angeles



flared tags, Los Angeles



Eyons TKO using barrio gang-style letterforms



# NOVA MAGAZINE

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**The first time I met up with Renos was a few years ago in a friendly little watering hole in San Francisco's Mission District. An affable guy with dark circles under his eyes that belie his passion for graffiti, we talked about skating, walking freight lines with an oilstick, and Bay Area graffiti history. Renos has a super-solid handstyle that is all over town, paints solid pieces with pop color sensibilities, and also has a lot on his mind.**

**How old are you?**

Uh, old enough to know better.

**Where are you based out of?**

The Bay area in general. That's pretty much my base of operations. I've kind of bounced around the whole area my entire life.

**Where did you grow up?**

20 miles south of San Francisco, north of San Jose. It's a little suburban area... well, it used to be. Now it's kind of a little bit high tech. So I grew up down there. Spent most of my time coming up to SF. It's where I picked up my writing, mostly.

**How did you get involved with writing?**

As a kid growing up in San Jose, I used to see cholo tags, a lot of XIV gang stuff. I just noticed it on the walls where I lived. My neighborhood was a barrio of sorts. All of my friends were Mexican and we used to all try and draw the letters, like the square block letters. I got good at that. I just kind of picked that up. But then the typical hip hop influence and graffiti I got from *Beat Street*, and *Subway Art*, and prior to that, I would go to New York during the summer and I noticed all of the graffiti around the neighborhoods where my family is from and I kind of just picked it up from there. I can still remember the first time I ever painted. Which was like fourth grade in a creek bed. That was the start of it.

**Right on. That's funny. What did it look like at first?**

It was pretty bad. We did like our little breaking names. Like Cosmic Street Rockers. And I did my little square Cosmic Kid breaking name. It was real bad. You know, I mean, it took us like ten minutes, and then someone saw us and we hopped on our bikes and dashed. But it was pretty bad, your real toy graffiti for the eighties, basically. I can still remember the moment precisely. I was thinking about my first actual time writing. And I can still remember getting on my bike, just the rush that I had. Going away, my heart was pounding, I was like, "oh shit, are we caught yet? Are we caught?" And I got to ride away. Yeah. It's kind of cool. And that was in, like, fourth grade. The start of the addiction.

**And then with the cholo styles... has that influenced your work at all, later on?**

I'd say to an extent but not really. I kind of found myself once I discovered the letters and the piecing, I went more towards that way. I was more impressed with the New

York style, and the New York style tags, which is what I found more appealing. But I've always been able to have a nice solid looking gangster style, so to speak.

**Do any of those kinds of letterforms influence your stuff?**

From that style? A little bit now as I'm older and I've practiced with diverse styles. A lot of times I'll work with that more as a base. A lot of the tops of the letters of cholo styles are curved. Each stroke is one line that's a curve. And then that makes up almost like a completely square letter. I've kind of tried to work with that a little bit, but not too much. I don't know, I've moved on, I guess you could say. A lot of the aesthetic value is pretty basic.

**What did you draw from? In terms of actual styles when you were growing up?**

I'd say from *Subway Art*, that was my bible. I used that as my base—it was what I used as a starting point. At the same time, there were a lot of local influences. You know, kids who painted around where I grew up that did nothing like the New York styles. They did their own interpretations of New York style, which were kind of like, arrows everywhere. You know, it didn't really have the same shape as the New York style letters. New York was a lot more advanced at that point. We were already seeing the upper advancements of that versus what was actually being painted here.

**What local characters would you say were influences?**

Like the early breakdancing crews back in San Jose that I used to see a lot, just with random, their concept was that they did graffiti, but the graffiti represented their breakdancing crew. In other words, they were more "B-Boys" than writers. There was a kid who wrote Rock 198 from San Jose... at that point too the crews became like, they developed their own styles that became specific to every little crew. That's kind of where I got a lot of my ideas from early on.

**How would you describe these different styles for each crew?**

Well, let's see. There's a kid who used to write Quickdraw. His were just really simple letters and there was an arrow at the end of every letter. Each bar ended with an arrow, and they went all different directions. And then that's when I started to pick up the fancy tags, which were down in San Jose. There would be a lot of cursive tags, with big arrows and big flares coming from them, off of them. That's kind of where I picked that up.

**Whose work you think is exemplary right now?**

That's a good question. Let's see, shit. I'd say my crew first of all—HTK. Those are my primary influences, we feed off each other. We bounce our styles off each other. Rolex, Diet, Cyme742, Kode, Revrs, Swirl, Jster, and a few others who are no longer active. Currently, I don't know if I even really have any to an extent, because I'm trying to develop my own style, but I'd say people like, I like Swet a lot, Kasez, Sento, Bates, Seen, FBA, there are so many... Let's see... Dream TDK (RIP), Spie, Dean, Dug and Bisaro. Those are

HEAD MIND HAND FOOT MOOD  
LOOK FORM CELL MODE LEFT  
BETA FOOD REAL NONE ZERO  
PARK WORK FEST WEST MUSE  
ROCK DRUM SONG GERM TELE

Fox Fuel Network's Fuel Family

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Akzidenz *News Venus Grotesque* Neuzeit  
**Futura Gill** Metro *Tempo* Nobel **Bell Trade**  
Helvetica *Univers Eurostile Olive Folio*  
*Syntax Polo* Frutiger Bell *Imago* Lucida  
**Rotis** Argo **Abadi** Officina Quay **Meta**

Laika family

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Translation **Simulacrum**  
**Appropriation** Cyborg **Trope**  
DISCOURSE **TELEOLOGY** MYTH  
**REFERENTIALITY** TEXTUALITY  
**SPECTACLE** GRAMMATOLOGY

Le Pretension Project 2: Sontag, Venturi, Jameson, Nader, & McLuhan

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**Renner** Koch ERBAR *Griffith* Dwiggins  
*Frutiger* **Miedinger** Novarese **Excoffon**  
**Meier** LANGE *Salden* **Carter** Unger  
Spiekermann *Majoor* **Licko** de Groot

AlfaSans family

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*Frutiger* **Miedinger** Novarese **Excoffon**  
**Meier** LANGE *Salden* **Carter** Unger  
Spiekermann *Majoor* **Licko** de Groot

AlfaSerif family

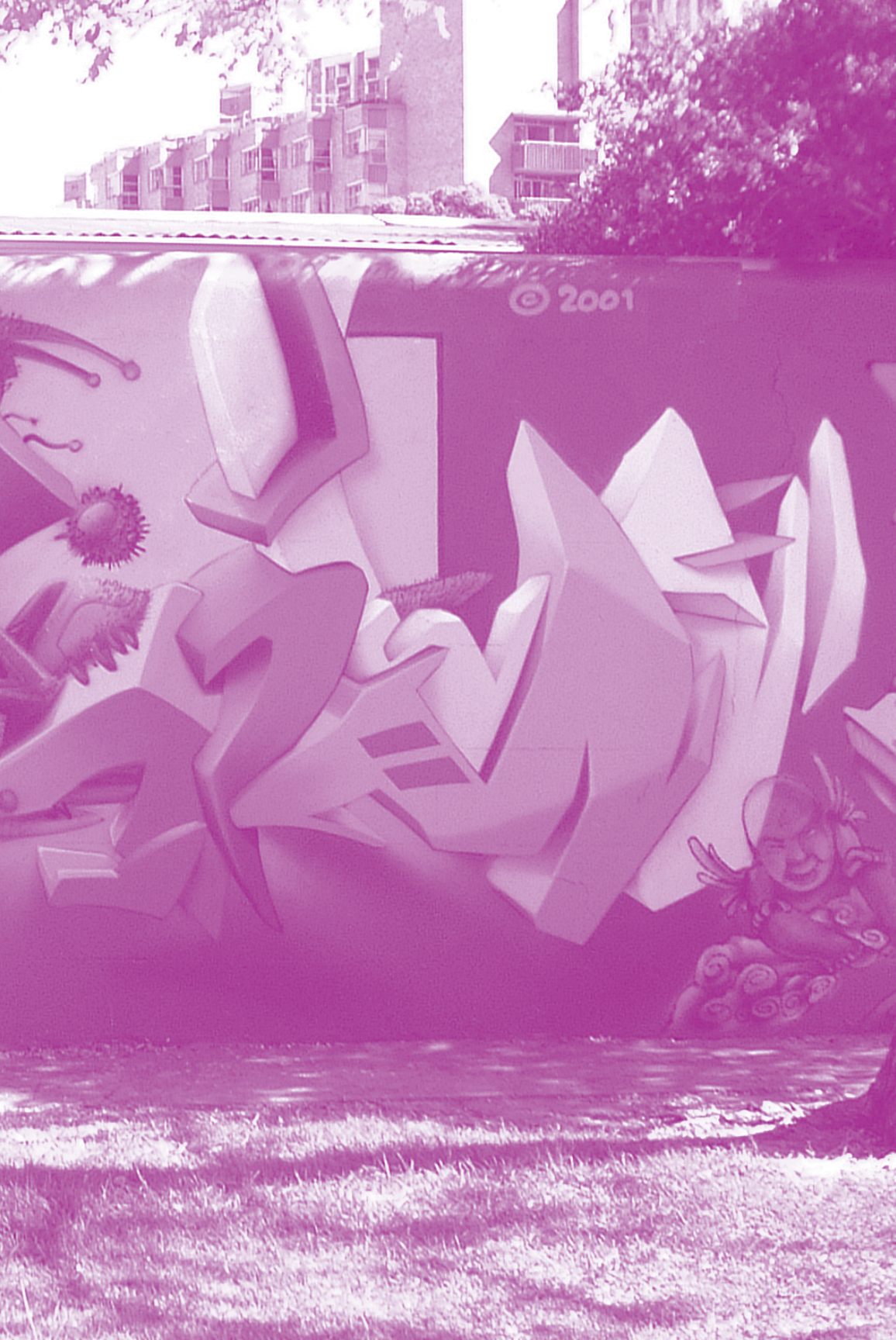
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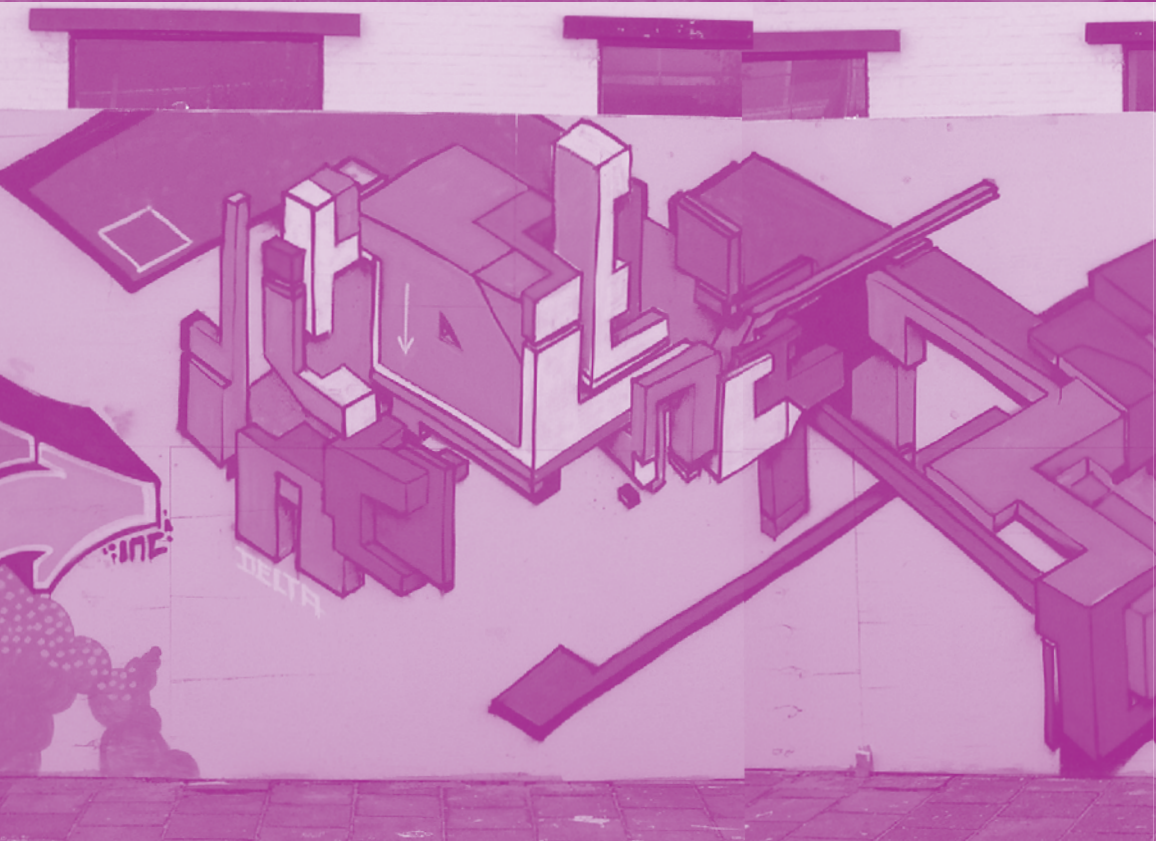
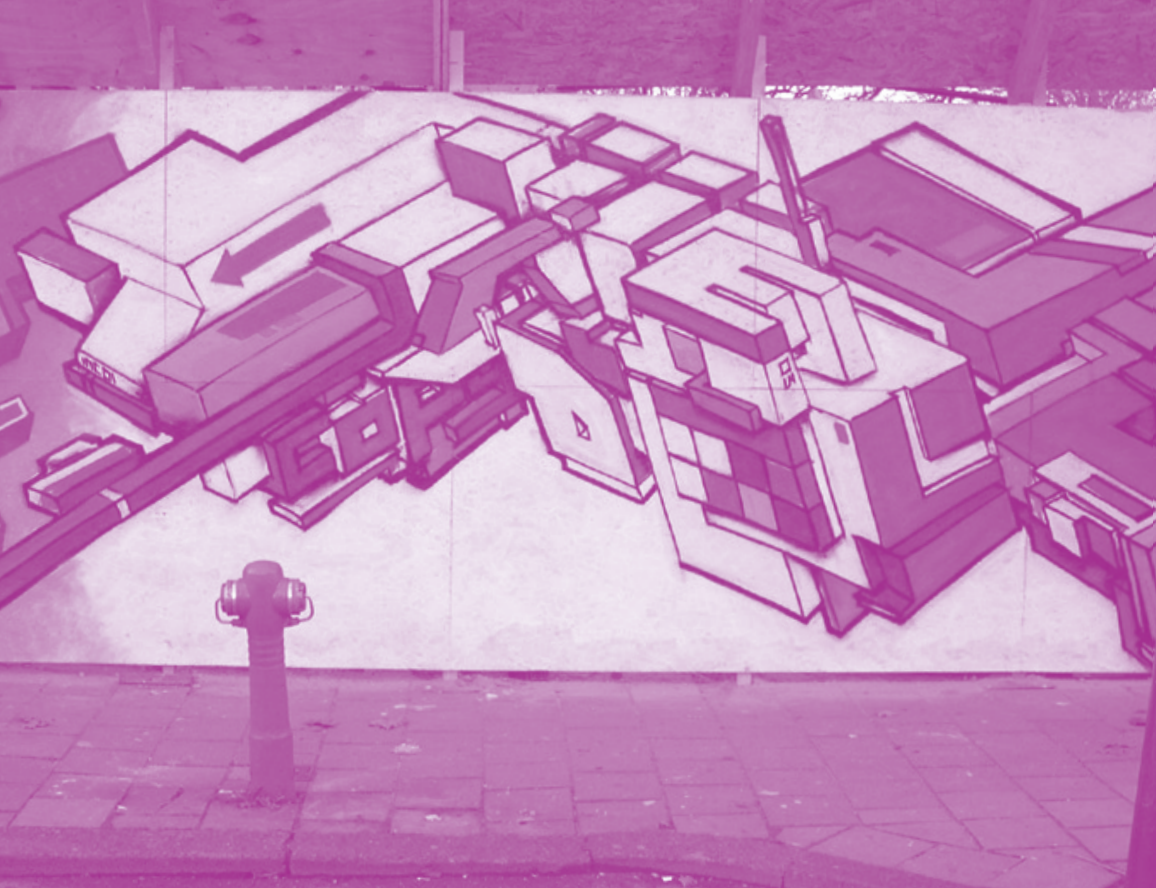
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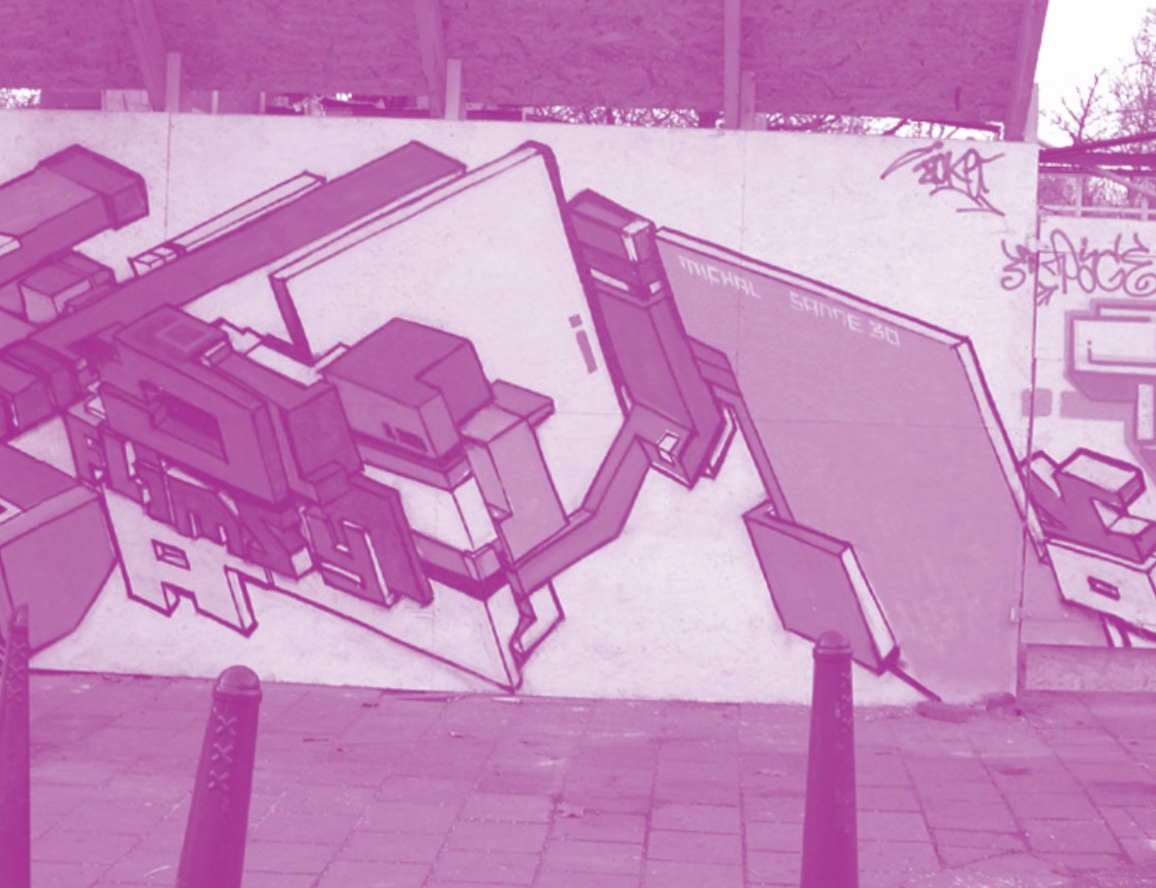
YORK,



(2) Chicken in a car, car can't go.....  
 CHICAGO









EXIST-ANGEL



QUANTON

AMAZE...

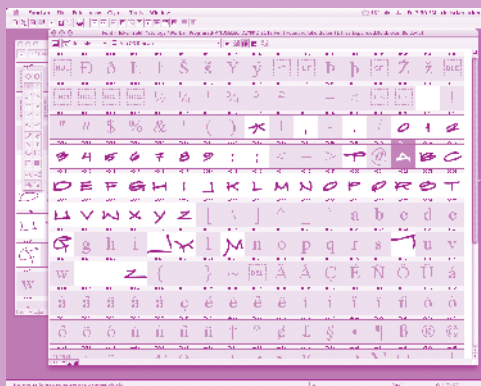
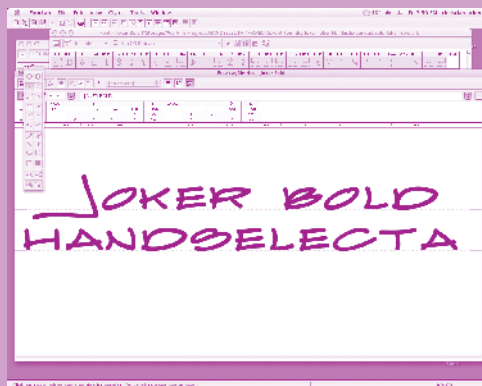
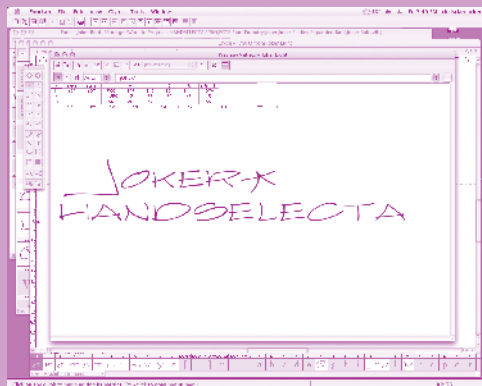
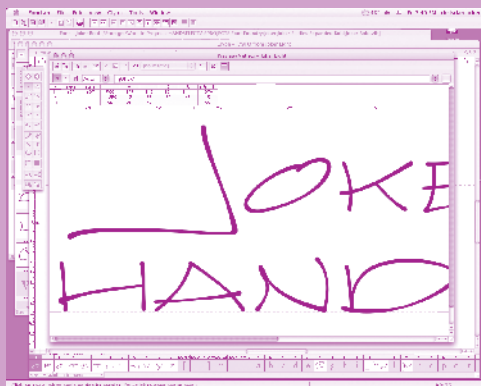
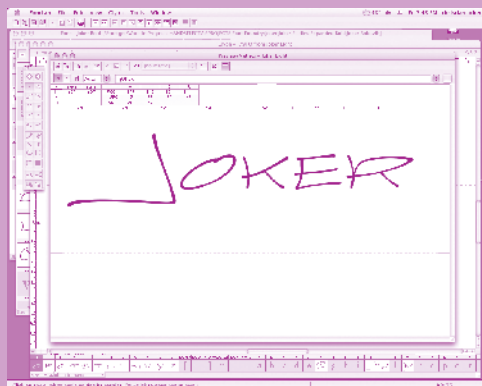
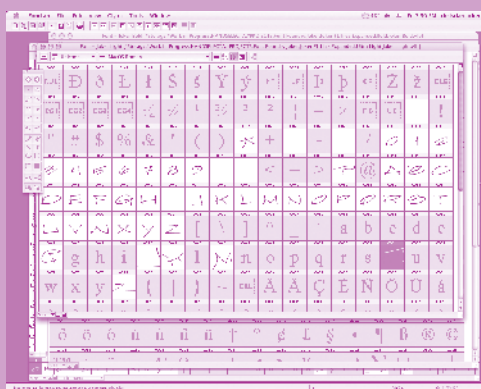
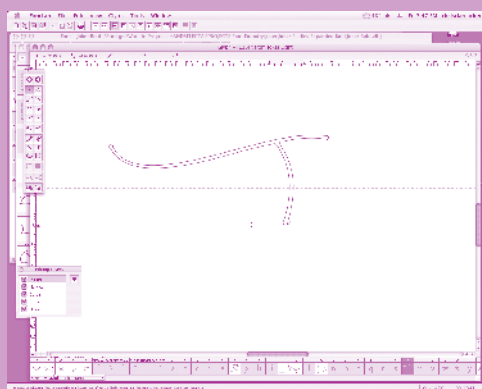
STRAIGHT  
LETTER  
STYLE MASTER  
BURN ALIVE  
BULLSHIT  
ARTISTS

MURDER  
CAPTIAL  
ARTISTS  
MCA  
TRANSCEND

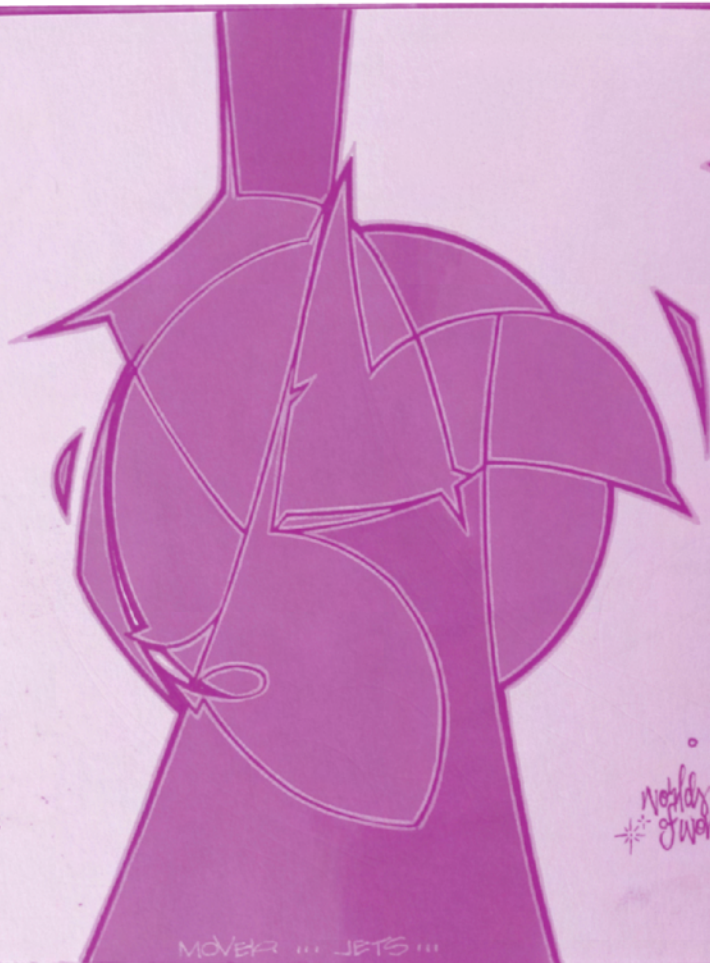
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STATUS

WASHINGTON D.C.  
RESTON VIRGINIA  
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IN THE PACIFIC  
NORTH WEST

SILENCE IN  
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TIMES FOR  
YA MIND

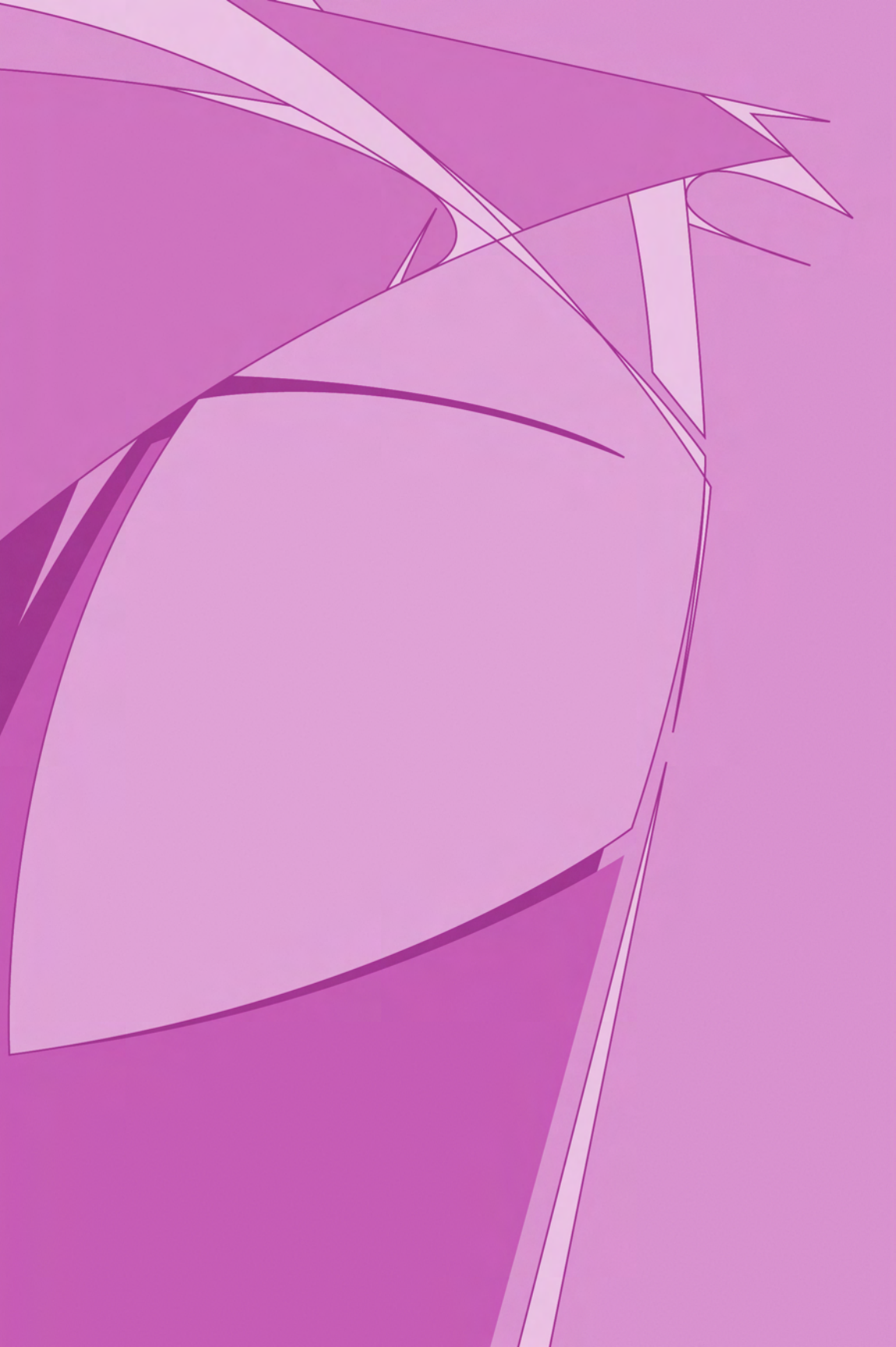


*Wendell*  
REST IN PEACE



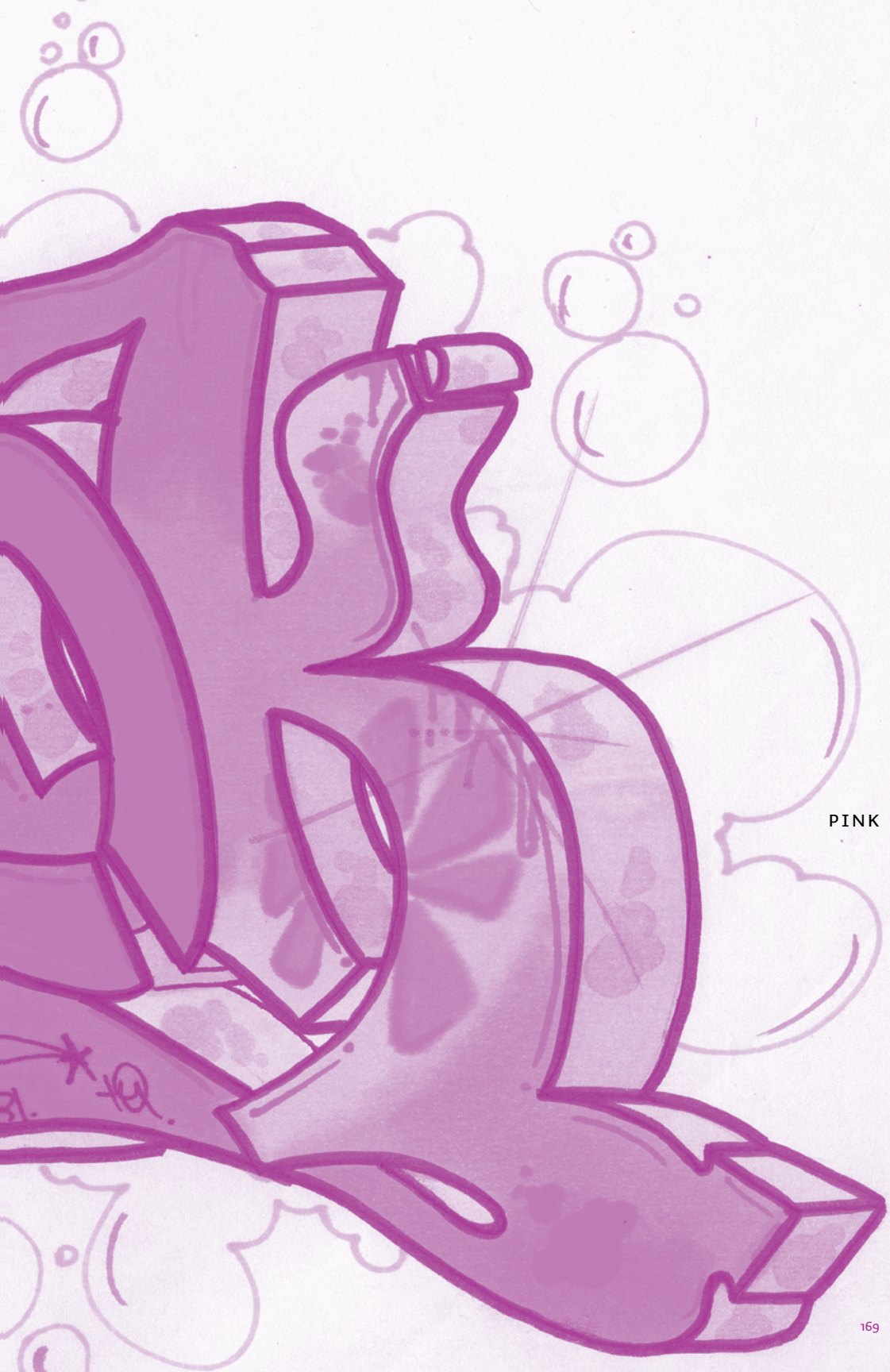
MOVER ... JETS ...

*Wendell*  
\* \* \*









PINK

### You are more interested in history?

Probably yes, but not too much. I would rather say I am more interested in book typography. A good book's typography is not really "inspirational" in a general sense. It should be inconspicuous and it has no obvious "style". That is much, much harder thing to achieve. It parallels to the form of most kitchenware, cups, bowls or chopsticks. If you try to implement your own "style" you would fail.

### Of all of the typefaces in the world, is there one out there that you really hate and why?

There is no type I really hate. I was asked a similar question by a Japanese designer who wrote *The Helvetica Book*. The question was, "which typeface do you like the best, Helvetica or Univers or Akzidenz Grotesk?" and I answered "I love them all". As Erik Spiekermann writes in his publication, "There is no bad type".

Avenir 35  
Avenir 45  
Avenir 55  
Avenir 65  
Avenir 85  
Avenir 95

original Avenir by Adrian Frutiger

ABCDEQRSY  
abcdefgrswxyz

original Palatino Italic by Hermann Zapf

ABCDEQRSY  
abcdefgrswxyz

Palatino Nova Italic by Hermann Zapf & Akira Kobayashi

**VOYAGE**  
**COMEDIES**  
**MANUFACTURE**

**HORSES**  
**AUCTION?**  
**WESTMINSTER**

ITC Magnifico Daytime & Nighttime

Avenir Next Ultra Light

Avenir Next Regular

Avenir Next Medium

Avenir Next Demi

**Avenir Next Bold**

**Avenir Next Heavy**

# TBRGothicabc1

和文のなかに latin alphabet

ABCDEFGHIJKLMabcdefghijkl1234567

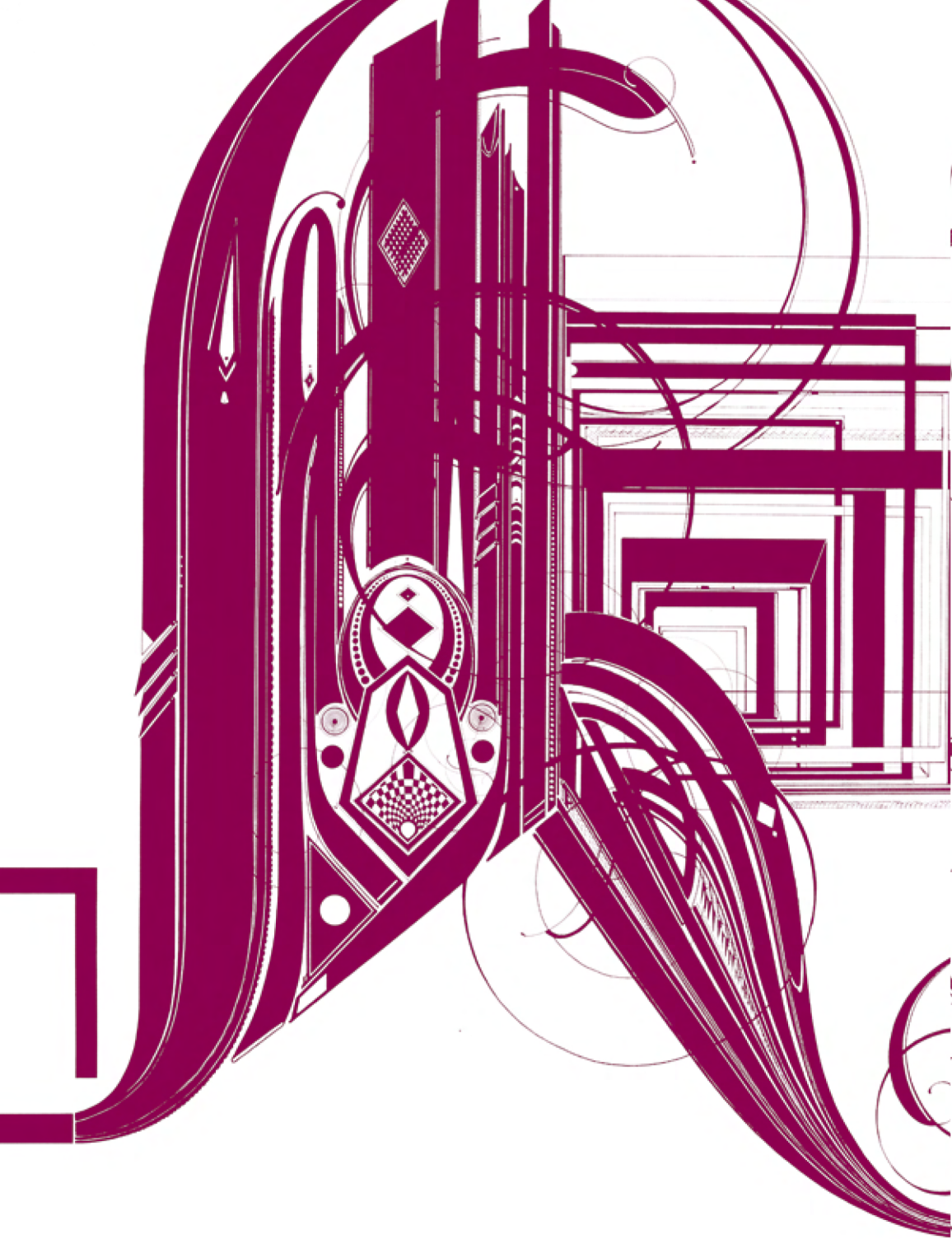
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和文のなかに latin alphabet

ABCDEFGHIJKLMabcdefghijkl12345678

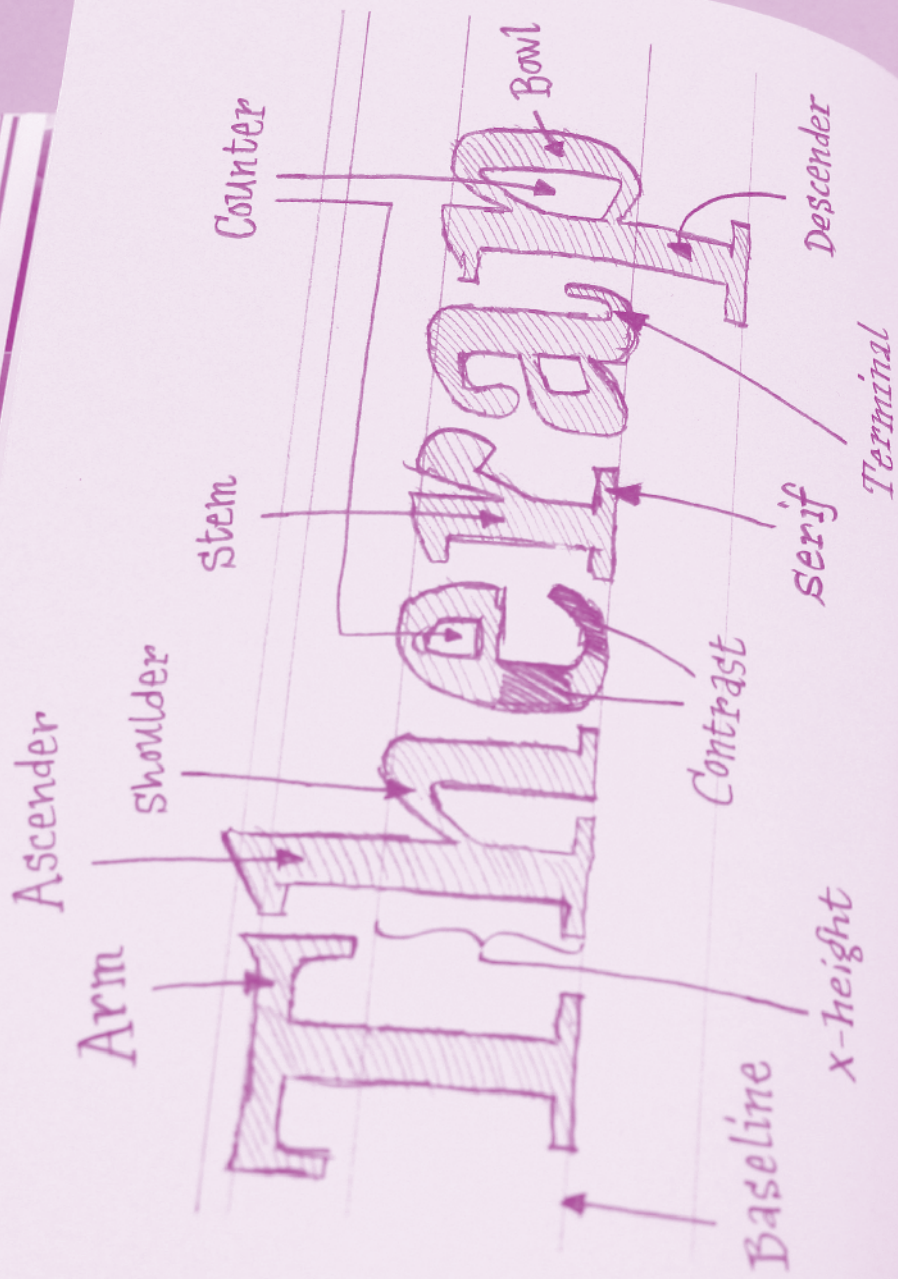
**GERMANIUM**  
*Energieniveaus*  
Hauptgruppenmetalle

**LANTHANOIDE**  
*Durchschnitteswert*  
Reaktionsgeschwindigkeit





TAUBA AUERBACH





bodoni / high contrast

helvetica / low contrast

EaEa

EaEa



pointed pen



broad nib

EaEa

EaEa

casimir / high contrast Gill Sans / low contrast

**alphic origin.** The characters on the top line have a different con-  
n than the characters on the bottom line. They have a different calli-  
: origin. It doesn't matter if a typeface has serifs (like Times New Roman)  
: these constructed

UNDERWARE

天遊本

大德無量  
無量壽佛



VALL  
GANG

GIES  
HOT?

MORM  
EXES

HENT  
TAVIZ

MORNING

years ago, I would have said AWR all had a similar style, the Tykes and the Krushes, with a few exceptions, but everybody else had a different style, but there was a similarity. And now, they're just taking it somewhere else... I mean, in LA, there's no yards. People still paint yards, but not a lot of people in my crew. We all go and paint on the freeway, or on a bridge, 200 feet in the air on a one-foot ledge, so I guess risking your life (laughter)

**Do you still go out bombing regularly?**

No, not regularly. I go out painting here and there, but for the past two years, I've done more painting in Mexico than here. If we take a trip or go whatever, I'll paint, but usually I'm just working on the computer and working on clothing. I paint canvases here and there. Sticker-bombing definitely. It's hard, I'm too old, and have too much responsibility and can't take the risks so much. I have to be at work on Monday morning (laughter).

**Is the ledge stuff pretty standard for your crew nowadays?**

Yeah, I think the active LA writers, both in my crew and in others, are out there doing some of the sickest graffiti. Personally, I think there are kids in my crew that are taking it one step beyond, but there are other kids that are just hitting different kinds of spots. Then there's the kids that jock spots, just waiting for a spot to get buffed, then hit it, or run up next to someone's stuff on something that's already been hit, which I think is wack, but there are a lot of other kids going out there and finding these spots that you've seen for twenty years, and you never noticed them, then boom!, "why didn't I think of that?". They're doing stuff on just another level.

**Are kids there exploring new media, like Vogue and his pump can- people pushing what can be done with tools or materials?**

Nah, I think that people in LA just have so much stuff going on that they don't have time to sit down and think about how to do things, instead we just do it. I notice more, being older now, that LA people tend to do stuff the hard way. But sometimes, you might catch a kid in climbing gear or something, but usually they're just out there, holding on with their hands or tying a jacket or something... maybe we do stuff kind of backwards, but I think we're just too occupied and in our free time, we're out busy racking or something. Not that I'm out racking anymore, but the younger kids, if they're not painting, they're racking, or doing this or that. There is no free time.



Grime



Norm



Revok



BNE & MQ

*Parallel Strokes* is a collection of interviews with nineteen contemporary typeface designers, graffiti writers, and lettering artists around the world. The book is introduced with a comprehensive essay charting the history of graffiti, its relation to type design, and how the two practices relate in the wider context of lettering.

Interviews within include conversations with type design collective Underware, Japanese type designer Akira Kobayashi, American graffiti writer and fine artist Barry McGee/Twist, German graffiti writers Daim and Seak, American lettering artist, graphic designer and design educator Ed Fella, among others.

*Parallel Strokes* is an inquiry into the history, context, and development of lettering today, both culturally approved and illicit.

**WORDSHAPE**

\$20

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